

Leadership Principles and Traits

Introduction

Leaders are people who do the right thing.
Managers are people who do things right.

-- Warren G. Bennis

Any discussion of leadership in today's Air Force must include the controversial and emotional issue of whether an officer should be a leader or a manager. Some observers insist that military success depends on management, while others would insist that charismatic leadership is the key. In this lesson we'll examine these two concepts as well as discuss the principles and traits of the effective Air Force leader.

Study Assignment

Read the information section of this lesson.

Lesson Objective: Comprehend the leadership principles and traits.

Samples of Behavior:

1. In your own words, paraphrase the leadership principles.
2. Given a scenario, identify the traits of the effective leader.

Information

The Air Force Leadership Concept

Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. The concept of effective leadership must include two fundamental elements:

- The Mission
- The People

All facets of Air Force leadership should support these two basic elements. They are embedded in the definition of leadership.

The Mission. The military organization's primary task is to perform its mission. This is paramount, and everything must be subordinate to this objective. Thus, the leader's primary responsibility is to lead people to carry out the unit's mission successfully. Former Air Force Chief of Staff, Curtis E. LeMay, stated "No matter how well you apply the art of leadership, no matter how strong your unit, or how high the morale of your men, if your leadership is not directed completely toward

the mission, your leadership has failed.” Yet, a leader must never forget the importance of the unit’s personnel.

The People. People perform the mission. They are the heart of the organization and without their support a unit will fail. One of a leader’s responsibilities is the care and support of the unit’s personnel. Successful leaders continually ensure the needs of their subordinates are met promptly and properly.

Leadership Traits

Effective leaders have certain distinguishing characteristics, which are the foundation for their approach to the leadership situation. The list of a leader’s desirable qualities is virtually endless. While many characteristics (such as truthfulness) are expected of all members of the military profession, there are six traits that are vital to Air Force leaders.

1. **Integrity.** The total commitment to the highest personal and professional standards. A leader must be honest and fair. Integrity means establishing a set of values and adhering to those values. Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Gabriel said, “Integrity is the fundamental premise of military service in a free society. Without integrity, the moral pillars of our military strength -- public trust and self-respect -- are lost.”
2. **Loyalty.** A three dimensional trait which includes faithfulness to superiors, peers, and subordinates. Leaders must first display an unquestionable sense of loyalty before they can expect members of their unit to be loyal. General George S. Patton Jr. highlighted the importance of loyalty saying, “There is a great deal of talk about loyalty from the bottom to the top. Loyalty from the top down is even more necessary and much less prevalent.”
3. **Commitment.** The complete devotion to duty. A leader must demonstrate total dedication to the United States, the Air Force, and the unit. Plato said, “Man was not born for himself alone, but for his country.” Dedicated service is the hallmark of the military leader.
4. **Energy.** An enthusiasm and drive to take the initiative. Throughout history successful leaders have demonstrated the importance of mental and physical energy. They approached assigned tasks aggressively. Their preparation included physical and mental conditioning which enabled them to look and act the part. Once a course of action was determined, they had the perseverance and stamina to stay on course until the job was completed.
5. **Decisiveness.** A willingness to act. A leader must have the self-confidence to make timely decisions. The leader must then effectively communicate the decision to the unit. British Admiral Sir Roger Keyes emphasized that, “In all operations a moment arrives when brave decisions have to be made if an enterprise is to be carried through.” Of course, decisiveness includes the willingness to accept responsibility. Leaders are always accountable -- when things go right and when things go wrong.

6. **Selflessness.** Sacrificing personal requirements for a greater cause. Leaders must think of performing the mission and caring for the welfare of the men and women in the organization. Air Force leaders cannot place their own comfort or convenience before the mission or the people. Willingness to sacrifice is intrinsic to military service. Selflessness also includes the courage to face and overcome difficulties. While courage is often thought of as an unselfish willingness to confront physical dangers, equally important -- and more likely to be tested on a daily basis -- is the moral courage a leader needs to make difficult decisions. General Douglas MacArthur said, "No action can safely trust its martial honor to leaders who do not maintain the universal code which distinguishes those things that are right and those things that are wrong." It requires courage and strength of character to confront a tough situation head-on rather than avoiding it by passing the buck to someone else.

These traits are essential to effective leadership. Developing these characteristics will improve your ability to employ the leadership principles.

Leadership Principles

An Air Force leader is flexible enough to meet changing circumstances, competent enough to perform under adverse conditions, courageous enough to lead at the risk of life or career, and courageous enough to stand on principle and to do what is right. The leadership principles are guides that have been tested and proven over time by successful leaders. Many of these principles are related to the Air Force Core Values. As you comprehend and apply these principles, you and your subordinates will begin to experience success in all your efforts.

1. **Take Care of Your People.** People are our most valuable resource who should be cared for to the best of a leader's ability. The time and effort a leader spends taking care of subordinates and co-workers will be amply rewarded in increased unit morale, effectiveness, and cohesion. Leaders should exhort each unit member to reach their maximum potential and thus their value to the Air Force. An effective and thorough effort to resolve threats to the individual's and family's well being will free airmen to achieve their potential. Find out what their requirements are and be sensitive to human needs. Are the people housed adequately; are they well fed; are they paid promptly; are there personal problems with which they need help? When people are worried about these conditions, they cannot focus their full attention on their job, and the mission will suffer. If people believe they are cared for as well as circumstances will permit, the leader is in a position to earn their confidence, respect, and loyalty.
2. **Motivate People.** Your greatest challenge is motivating subordinates to achieve the high standards set for them. *Motivation is the key to successful leadership.* Motivation is the moving force behind successful leadership. In fact, the ability to generate enthusiasm about the mission may be the single most important factor in leadership. Recognition of the efforts people put forth is one positive way in which motivation toward mission accomplishment pays

dividends. The leader who publicly applauds the efforts of unit personnel builds a cohesive organization, which will accomplish the mission.

Motivating people depends on understanding their needs and working to align these needs with unit requirements. Most people will work for an organization, which they know, cares about them, and one in whose mission they believe. Remember, the most powerful form of lasting motivation is self-motivation. One of your goals as a leader should be to provide an environment that fosters and rewards self-motivation.

3. **Be a Follower.** The Air Force expects all its leaders first to be followers. Airmen observe their leaders and take from them successful traits while avoiding those that are counterproductive. Good followers also understand and take personal pride in their contribution to the total Air Force mission; they have the strength of character to be gratified by the collective pride in a fine team effort without seeking individual reward. Effective followers have the strength of character to flourish without seeking “hero” status and are willing and able to participate in a team effort to effectively employ aerospace power.
4. **Know Your Job.** People who follow a competent person who has the knowledge needed to complete the mission successfully. The Air Force leader should have a broad view of the unit’s mission, and should ensure all members understand how their jobs relate to mission accomplishment.

Between World War I and World War II, the Army Air Corps was fortunate to have men like General Henry Arnold and General Carl Spaatz. These men knew their jobs and how they could enhance the mission. Their preparation and vision paid substantial dividends when they were charged with building a force to fight the air battles of World War II. But, just as important as their own competence, these leaders ensured assigned people knew their responsibilities. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor stated, “One expects a military leader to demonstrate in his daily performance a thorough knowledge of his own job and further an ability to train his subordinates in their duties and thereafter to supervise and evaluate their work.”

5. **Know Yourself.** Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is important to successful leadership. You, the leader, must recognize your personal capabilities and limitations. Former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Robert G. Taylor put it this way: “Sure, everyone wants to be an effective leader, whether it be in the Air Force or in the community. You can and will be if you identify your strengths, capitalize on them, and consciously strive to reduce and minimize the times you apply your style inappropriately.” Don’t, however, ignore your weaknesses. Recognize them and strive to overcome them. In the interim, select team members whose strengths compensate for your weaknesses so that your collective efforts will get the job done.
6. **Set the Example.** You must set the standard for the unit. People will emulate your standards of person conduct and appearance. They will observe your negative characteristics as well as your positive ones. A leader’s actions must

be beyond reproach, if he or she is to be trusted. Deviations from high standards will only be amplified and the message of a leader's actions will permeate the entire organization. Regardless of how strongly we feel about ourselves, it is the public perception of our actions that count in the end and become "reality." For example, the supervisor who violates basic standards of morality invariably ends up in a compromising situation. A leader who drinks excessively or who abuses controlled drugs sends a dangerous message: I cannot control myself; how can I control you? Lack of self-discipline in a leader destroys the unit's cohesion and, ultimately impairs its ability to perform the mission.

People do not expect their leaders to be saints. But they do expect leadership from a person who recognizes the importance of example. As General George S. Patton, Jr. once remarked, "You are always on parade."

7. **Communicate.** Information should flow continuously throughout the organization. Former Air Force Chief of Staff General Thomas D. White believed, "Information is the essential link between wise leadership and purposeful action." Communication is a two-way process. An informed leader is able to evaluate realistically the unit's progress toward mission accomplishment. Successful leaders listen to what their people have to say, and are always looking for the good ideas which can flow up the chain. It is the leader's job to keep all channels open. The more senior a leader becomes, the more listening skills are required.
8. **Educate Yourself and Others.** People should be properly trained to do their jobs. Professional military education, professional development education, technical training schools, and on-the-job training are formal means by which Air Force personnel are trained. Informal training, practice, and personal experience at the unit level are crucial reinforcements to formal training. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur observed, "In no other profession are the penalties for employing untrained personnel so appalling or so irrevocable as in the military." Greater efficiencies are possible with a highly trained and skilled force; therefore, education must be a top priority.
9. **Equip Your Troops.** It's your responsibility to ensure the unit is equipped properly to accomplish the mission. If they do not have the proper tools, obtain them. Proper tools include equipment and facilities that lead to mission accomplishment. Occasionally, needed tools are not available in enough quantity or are not available to you at all, despite your best efforts to obtain them. In these situations a good leader works to develop a creative alternative and solicits solutions from those doing the job. A poorly equipped force cannot capitalize on its extensive training and requires more personnel or time to accomplish its mission than a properly equipped force. Your leadership responsibilities include identifying needs, securing funds, and then obtaining the necessary weapons, tools, and equipment.
10. **Accept Responsibilities.** General Curtis E. LeMay was once asked to provide a one-word definition of leadership. After some thought, General LeMay replied, "If I had to come up with one word to define leadership, I would say

responsibility.” As a leader you are responsible for performing the unit’s mission. If you fail, you are accountable for the consequences. Any unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure destroys your credibility as a leader and breaks the bond of respect and loyalty. Accountability also includes the requirement for discipline within a unit. A leader should reward a job well done and punish those who fail to meet their responsibilities or establish standards. The former is easy, even enjoyable; the latter is much more difficult, but equally necessary. George Washington observed, “Discipline is the soul of an Army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to all.”

11. **Develop Teamwork.** Leaders cannot accomplish the mission alone. It is also impossible for followers to accomplish the entire mission while working completely along. As a leader you must mold a collection of individual performers into a cohesive team that works together to accomplish the mission. The unit’s mission will suffer if each person in your organization is “doing his own thing” in isolation. As the leader, you should know how the various functions within the unit fit together and how they must work in harmony. You should create and maintain an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperation to meet mission demands. Teamwork comes when people are willing to put the unit’s mission before all else.

The Leadership Situation

Leadership has been defined as the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. Management is the manner in which resources are used to achieve objectives. Military leaders should also be aware of their responsibilities as Air Force managers. British Field Marshall Lord Slim made a clear distinction:

There is a difference between leadership and management. The leader and the men who follow him represent one of the oldest, most natural, and most effective of all human relationships. The manager and those he manages are a later product with neither so romantic, nor so inspiring a history. Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality and vision--its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, more a matter of accurate calculation, statistics, methods, timetables, and routine--its practice is a science. Managers are necessary; leaders are essential.

In essence, you lead **people** and you manage **things**. The Air Force needs people who can do both. The requirement is for the proper division of attention between the two, with the proportion dependent on the situation. Approach each leadership situation paying careful attention to the four primary factors: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment.

- **The Mission.** Most missions involve many tasks that must be completed if the unit is to fulfill its responsibilities. The leader must define the mission and set priorities for its various components. In many instances higher headquarters has defined the mission. Yet, the leader should translate the higher direction

into goals with which people will relate. When possible, the leader should involve unit personnel in setting these goals to ensure their support. Individual involvement is very important when total effort is needed from everyone. The goals must be challenging but attainable. Goals that are unrealistic frustrate even the most dedicated people.

Set reasonable and acceptable standards of job performance to make sure that goals are met. These standards must be consistent with the mission, and defined clearly for every individual. Recognize those who meet or exceed standards, prescribe additional training for those who cannot, and take corrective action for those who will not. When standards are not met, determine the reason and move quickly to correct the situation through training or, if appropriate, administrative or disciplinary action. Get the facts, then act.

- **The People.** Be sensitive to people. People perform the mission. Understanding people helps determine the appropriate leadership action to take in a given situation. You cannot be totally successful at getting the most out of people without first knowing the capabilities of those you are leading. Capabilities have two principal elements: training and experience.
 - Training. Assess the level of training in the unit. If the people are not trained, do what it takes to get them the necessary training. Your subordinates cannot successfully accomplish the mission without the proper training. Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant John L. Levitow credited his heroic action under fire to the training he received.
 - Experience. Levels of experience vary widely. A leader should identify each individual's experience and ability to perform in various situations. Do not base your evaluation of an individual's experience solely on rank. While rank may be a good overall experience indicator, the person may never have accomplished a particular job or been in a particular environment.
- **The Leader.** Successful military leaders adapt their leadership style to meet the mission demands, and use an approach that capitalizes on their strengths. For example, if you are able to communicate effectively with people on an individual basis but are uncomfortable when speaking to large groups, then use personal conferences as much as possible. If you write well, take advantage of this skill by writing letters of appreciation or using other forms of correspondence. If you are a good athlete, organize and participate in unit sporting activities. In other words, capitalize on your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.
- **The Environment.** Leaders should carefully consider the environment in which they work. Leadership methods, which worked in one situation with one group, may not work with the same group in a different environment. Consider the squadron that is permanently based in the United States, but deploys overseas for an extended period of temporary duty. Billeting or food service difficulties, equipment, or parts shortages, family separation problems,

inclement weather, etc. may occur. Any of these problems create an entirely new environment with which the unit's leader must cope. As a leader, you must alter your leadership behavior, as necessary, to accommodate changes in the environment of the given mission. Be sensitive to your surroundings.

Roles of Leadership and Management

To better explain the roles of management and leadership, we'll examine them in terms of three elements: behavior, personal characteristics, and organization situation.

Behavior. Managerial behavior is based on building organizational relations that mesh together like parts of a timepiece. Leadership behavior, on the other hand, concentrates on making the hands of the timepiece move so as to display the time of day. The behavioral focus of each is clearly important, but while the manager may be preoccupied with the precision of the process, the leader concentrates on the inertial forces that drive the process. Warren Bennis, a professor and researcher who has devoted years to studying leadership, summarizes the two behaviors as: "Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done."

Effective leaders are often described as "dynamic," which is regarded as beneficial because it denotes movement and change. The function of leadership is not only to produce change, but also to set the direction of that change. Management, however, uses the function of planning to produce orderly results, not change.

Managers use the management process to control people by pushing them in the right direction. Leaders motivate and inspire people by satisfying their human needs, keeping them moving in the right direction to achieve a vision. To do this, leaders tailor their behavior towards their followers' need for achievement, sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, and control over their lives. Bennis offers the following summary of this behavioral comparison:

MANAGERS	LEADERS
• Administers	• Motivates
• Maintains	• Develops
• Controls	• Inspires

Personal Characteristics. The following figure illustrates an interesting comparison of successful leaders and managers that was researched by Professor Robert White of Indiana University. Everyone has been exposed to both types of

characteristics from experience that neither is exclusively positive or negative depending on the prevalence of the characteristics.

MANAGERS	LEADERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solvers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysts of purposes and causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values driven
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek conflict avoidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only accept but invite conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive on predictability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguous
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure that the organization's objectives are achieved, even if they disagree with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure that their objectives and those of the organization become one in the same

The best managers tend to become good leaders because they develop leadership abilities and skills through practicing good management techniques. Seldom is there an effective leader who has not been a good manager. Similarly, managers who become successful leaders have humanized their management skills with inspiration, empowerment, and vision through a catalyst called charisma. Social scientist Alan Bryman goes so far as to suggest that management styles may set the stage for charisma.

Organizational Situation. What are the organization implications of these two concepts of management and leadership? Leaders launch and steer the organization towards the pursuit of goals and strategies. Managers ensure the resources needed to get there are available and are used along the way. An organization needs both leadership and management, and if they are combined in one person or persons, so much the better.

To achieve a plan, managers organize and staff jobs with qualified individuals, communicating the plan to those people, delegating the responsibility for carrying out the plan, and devising systems to monitor its implementation. What you, as an officer, will need to do, however, is not to organize people, but to align them, and that is a leadership activity.

Conclusion

What is the relative importance of effective leadership and management? Strong leadership with weak management is no better, and sometimes actually worse, than the opposite. The challenge is to achieve a balance of strong leadership and strong management. A peacetime military can survive with good administration and management up and down the hierarchy, coupled with good leadership concentrated

at the top. A wartime force, however, needs competent leadership at all levels. Good management brings a degree of order and consistency to key issues like readiness, availability, and sustainment. But no one has yet figured out how to manage people into battle. They must lead.

Embrace the proven leadership traits and principles. The Air Force requires every airman, officer and enlisted, to reflect these traits and principles, at every level, when performing the Air Force mission – our success in war and peace depends on it.

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